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Cross-genre Talk: Expanding the Ground

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Clark, Herbert H. *Arenas of Language Use*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press and the Center for the Study of Language and Information, 1992. xviii + 419 pp. including notes, references, and index. $47.50 cloth, $19.95 paper.

Tannen, Deborah, ed. *Gender and Conversational Interaction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. xiv + 327 pp. including notes, references, and index. $45.00 cloth, $16.95 paper.

Burke, Peter. *The Art of Conversation*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993. viii + 178 pp. including notes, references, and index. $39.95 cloth, $13.95 paper.

INTRODUCTION

Scholarship is an interactive process. The venues of communication in this highly ritualized forum are publications, such as books, articles, and reviews, in which turns are typically monologic, and made by authoritative selection. The process is dialogic, however, insofar as each turn is expected to acknowledge former turns relevant to it, and to build upon them. This takes understanding. Although the three works reviewed here are dedicated to language and society, the authors -- a psychologist, an anthropologist, and a historian -- bring different perspectives to the subject matter. The essays, and the languages used to construct them, are strikingly different, each having a distinct system of values and techniques that shapes the scholarly product. Indeed, the three works seem to speak past one another: the problem is a lack of agreement regarding what constitutes linguistic

investigation.

UNDERSTANDING: HERBERT CLARK

The psychologist Herbert Clark has dedicated over two decades of research to how listeners understand utterances. In *Arenas of Language Use*, he presents twelve of his principal essays representing research with collaborators dating to 1974, and published between the years 1981-1991. Clark's approach to the pragmatics of language use represents the merging of two traditions, one deductive/philosophical, the other experimental. Although trained in the experimental methods of cognitive psychology, Clark's strongest influence derives from the philosophical traditions of speech action theory, particularly the writings of Oxford philosophers John Austin, Paul Grice, and John Searle. In his research program principles of speech action theory are put to experimental test. According speech action theorists, people use language to accomplish actions (see, for example, Austin 1962). What is relevant is not whether a speech act is grammatical but whether it succeeds in accomplishing the speaker's intentions. Interpretability is therefore a question of efficacy, of what has been accomplished through the interaction of speaker and listener in a speech act.

It was a primary concern of the speech action theorists to determine how listeners recognized a speaker's attitudes and intentions (Schiffer 1972). Within this field of inquiry, Clark was strongly influenced by the theorist Paul Grice in two related areas: 1) the recognition of intentions, and 2) speaker/listener cooperation (Grice 1957, 1968, 1969, 1975; see also Searle 1969; Bach and Harnish 1979). Grice's work suggested that speakers intend their hearers to recognize the meaning or goal of their intentions, and to respond; in this way language is a collaborative enterprise.

COMMON GROUND

Arenas is written in the Gricean tradition. "Speaking and listening aren't autonomous activities," Clark writes. "When two people use language, it is like shaking hands, playing a piano duet...it takes coordination, even collaboration" (p. xvi). Among Clark's major contributions toward understanding the collaborative processes of speech is his work on speaker coordination in establishing "common ground."

Certain conditions must be met in order for a speech act to be successful (see, for example, Lyons 1977). Among these conditions is a shared groundwork, or context, of mutual understanding. In any exchange of talk, a participant is rationally justified in taking for granted a set of propositions, including what all the participants are in a position to perceive as true, and what they mutually know or assume (Karttunen and Peters 1975). Common ground, put simply, refers to the sum of mutual

knowledge, beliefs, and suppositions shared by speakers and hearers.

In a series of papers written with collaborators between 1973 and 1978, Clark proposed a number of principles on the subject of common ground that would today find wide agreement among researchers. They are summarized by Clark in his 1992 book: (1) the participants in a conversation work together against a background of shared information (later called common ground); (2) As the discourse proceeds, the participants accumulate shared information by adding to it with each utterance; (3) Speakers design their utterances so that their addressees can readily identify what is to be added to that common ground (pp. 4-5).

In collaborations begun in 1973, and reprinted in this volume, Clark explores the intricate means by which speakers establish and affirm common ground. With Haviland, for example, Clark found observational evidence for a model that demonstrates the means by which speakers and listeners cooperate contractually to organize talk into given and new kinds of information (Clark and Haviland 1977; see also Halliday 1967).

Experimentation led Clark to the proposition that the common ground between speakers is based upon three types of source information: 1) perceptual evidence; 2) linguistic evidence; and 3) community membership (pp. 81-82). But such a corpus of information would be far too large and unwieldy for ordinary access. How, then, is this vast collection of mutual beliefs to be represented, stored, and retrieved? Experiments carried out in collaboration with Catherine Marshall in 1976 indicated that the mental representations of mutual knowledge and beliefs are retained in an elementary, yet full and, accurate, form. Participants, experiments showed, need not confirm any of the particulars from among the conditions in mutual knowledge. Instead, they do so in principle, rather than in fact, by establishing proper grounds for mutual knowledge. Clark and Marshall suggest treating mutual knowledge "as a single mental entity instead of an infinitely long list of even more complex mental entities" (p. 34).

Clark continued to research how common ground is cooperatively constructed by speakers through examining how participants judge salience against common ground. In a series of experiments designed with Sam Burtick on demonstrative reference, students were shown complex images and asked to describe one unspecified item in the image. The responses provided "a natural scale of understandability," or a range of more or less "defective" references (p. 83).

To infer a demonstrative relation for underdetermined reference is not simple. Given the constraints of the experiment, participants were forced to draw inferences by appealing to a "relevant context," consisting, according to Clark, of the common ground between speaker and addressee. In selecting the

object that both fits the descriptor and is the most salient against a common ground, speaker and addressee must recognize a unique signal that coordinates their expectations of each other and treat that signal as the focal object in their common ground (p. 97; and see Schelling 1960).

In a series of separate collaborations carried out between 1981 and 1987 with Thomas Carlson, Deanna Wilkes-Gibbs, and Edward Schaefer, and reprinted in this volume, Clark extends this exploration into the way in which a coordinated common ground is essential to the efficacy of speech acts. A conversation may be viewed as a sequence of speech acts that operates cumulatively, with each turn incrementally augmenting the common ground shared by the speakers (Gazdar 1979; Stalnaker 1978). Since participants accumulate common ground as they talk, each utterance must be designed against a common ground that changes from moment to moment. But if common ground accumulates in conversation, Clark asked (p. 103), how does reference, for example, change with the expanding ground? In 1981 Clark and Deanna Wilkes-Gibbs set up a referential communication task in order to demonstrate collaboration between speaking partners. The collaborative model proposed by Clark and Wilkes-Gibbs in 1986 (ALU, Chapter 4) was limited to references as opposed to whole utterances. Subsequent experimentation with Edward Schaefer, based upon data derived from telephone directory inquiries, extends these findings to conversation (Clark and Schaefer 1987). I point to this series of inquires because it is one of the few instances in which Clark's research takes him to naturally-occuring behavior. Yet, while the directory assistance inquiries occur in a natural context rather than a laboratory, the interaction calls for unusal accuracy within a highly structured frame of interaction. It may provide but limited insight into ordinary conversation.

PARTICIPATION: Who hears (understands) what and the politics of language

While Grice's notion of speaker's meaning applied to addressees, it did not apply to side participants. So, in the late 1970s, Clark began work on a system of listener classification based upon a notion he referred to as "modes of understanding." Each listener type -- addressees, side participants, bystanders, and eavesdroppers -- is designated by virtue of the information they appeal to in understanding the speaker. In Clark's model, derived from speech action theory, and influenced by the sociologist Erving Goffman (1976), "addressees can recognize what the speaker means because they are intended to" (p. 202).

For Clark, overhearers represent an important test case in the design of utterances (p. 201). Since speakers are under no obligation to make sure overhearers understand what they mean, Clark argued, they do not seek evidence of understanding from overhearers, and overhearers don't offer any evidence

("it would be rude and meddlesome if they did" p. 105). Clark concludes that "An important prediction of both the collaborative model of reference, and the theory of contributions, is that addressees should come to understand almost everything speakers tell them, but overhearers should not" (p. 105).

It was problematic, then, in 1979, when Clark's wife remarked in his presence to their three-month old son, "Damon, don't you think Herb should change your diapers next time?" Clark writes, "Voil , I thought...She could only do that if she was "informing" me of what she is telling him, and her "informing" me must also be an illocutionary act" (p. 202). The "diaper statement," as I call it, points to a number of problems in Clark's approach. For this reason, and because it serves as a functional bridge to Tannen and Burke's volumes, I will discuss it here.

Clark's treatment of participant roles builds on Goffman's 1976 proposal in which listeners are classified into ratified and unratified participants. *Addressees* are "those ratified participants who are addressed, that is, oriented to by the speaker in a manner to suggest that his words are particularly for them, and that some answer is therefore anticipated from them" (Goffman 1976:260). In contrast, *overhearers* are unratified participants whether their participation is inadvertent or encouraged" (Goffman 1976:260).

The diaper dilemma results from the difficulty of locating Clark in the speech act. While models derived from speech act theory recognized collaboration between speakers and addressees, they recognized no relationship between speakers and overhearers. Since he was not the addressee, as the speaker clearly positions the infant Damon in that role, Clark reasoned, he must be an "overhearer." Clark's means of accommodating the distinction between addressee and non-ratified participant within speech act theory was to propose that a speaker performs two types of illocutionary acts with each utterance. For each addressee-directed illocutionary act, Clark suggests a new action, called an "informative," that serves to let additional, side participants know of the act (1982:352). In proposing a new type of illocutionary act, the "informative," and a process they labeled "informative analysis," Clark and co-author Thomas Carlson were to significantly revise speech act theory (Clark and Carlson 1982; Clark 1986:518; 1992: Chapter 7).

But if traditional speech act theory was unable to account for what is said to whom when more than one hearer is present, to what extent is the theory improved by introducing a second illocutionary function? There are several questions of concern here. First, who is the intended recipient of the message? Second, if the intended recipient is not named as the addressee, how does this alter our classification of participant roles and the behaviors associated with each? Third, should "understanding" be limited to a

function of speaker's intent? It would appear that Clark's methodology requires an infinity of linguistic concepts to account for the variety of speech forms encountered in everyday life.

In his criticism of Clark's discussion of *informatives*, Keith Allan (1986; and see rejoinder by Clark 1986) points out that "the mother is presumably expressing her thoughts to herself -- a condition not unknown among frustrated, housebound mothers" (1986:515). (According to Allan, the speaker, knowing the infant will not understand the utterance, is speaking to herself. To explain this Allan draws upon a social analysis external to the utterance: "frustrated, housebound mothers may wish to exclaim aloud.") For Clark, the recipient of the utterance is the infant; for Allan, the speaker's utterances are aimed at herself.

According to Clark's interpretation, the intent of the speaker places the infant in the role of addressee, and the husband as overhearer. But this interpretation overlooks the possibility of play in which the speaker constructs participation and participant roles by naming an addressee and thereby designating others present as "overhearers," yet targets her remark to the overhearer. This play could only be accomplished if the speaker knew that she and the overhearer were aware of the same set of rules. Only then is she able to accomplish her goal: to convey a message to the overhearer without appearing to do so. Rather than informing, the speaker might be making a request. But, if so, why disguise it?

In the 1976 essay, "Replies and Responses, " Goffman introduced the "declinable," a request for action that is presented in such a way that it can be turned down in order to preserve face. Whatever the outcome, the asker is let off the hook (1976:266). The concept better enables us to understand Clark's example; it supplies us, too, with a social, rather than a solely formal, analysis. By addressing the infant, and not the husband, speaker manages conversation so that no response is required. It is *as if* a request had not been made. Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson pointed out in 1978 that power differentials influence face concerns and a speaker may honor the positive self-image of a listener through such devices as politeness and other speech resources employed to convey delicate or potentially adversarial content. Clark's "diaper statement" illustrates that the power of language, as well as its social and intellectual import, is found in the adaptability of conventions such as indirection, vagueness, irony, and ambiguity.

The example is important, for it underscores the difficulty in interpreting the intent of the utterance without resorting to extralinguistic criteria -- the larger frame of social interaction in which talk is embedded and from which it derives meaning (Duranti and Goodwin 1992). The delicacy involved in a wife's request that her husband diaper his child points to the social and historical situatedness of all

speech. The artful indirection in the remark can be best understood in light of the historic moment in which it occurs and the changing gender relations it indexes: it is not prohibited to request that father diaper baby, but neither is it facile to make this request directly. The skillful construction reflects the power differential in gender and the related ambiguity in parenting roles that characterized U.S. domestic relations of the 1970s.

Clark's investigation into participation exemplifies the inadequacies of a method that approaches language apart from social context.[1] The "diaper statement" is an excellent example of the creative and strategic manipulation of speech resources to accomplish socially meaningful ends. If we are truly concerned with understanding, we cannot neglect the larger context in which speech takes place. Yet social contexts, the very "arenas of language use" foregrounded in the title of Clark's book, are virtually absent from its analysis.

CROSS-GENDER TALK: DEBORAH TANNEN

By taking as its central focus miscommunication, Tannen's collection *Gender and Conversational Interaction*, problematizes comprehension and related issues of common ground and participation through naturally-occurring example rather than decontextualized sentence artifact.

Deborah Tannen's volume represents what Hymes referred to as an "ethnography of speaking" (Hymes 1962, 1971) -- a socially constituted linguistics. In this alternative formulation, established in the mid 1960s by John Gumperz and Dell Hymes, focus is not on message-form, or addressee and recipient as isolated dyads, but on speech as an interactive social process (Gumperz and Hymes 1964, 1972; Gumperz 1971; Hymes 1964, 1971, 1972, 1974a,b; see also Fishman 1972; Labov 1970). As such, the unit of analysis is a socially-situated, naturally-occurring speech event.

As exemplified in the Tannen volume, ethnographically-oriented linguistics recognizes that talk is organized in each society in culturally specific ways. The point of departure in this approach is the speech community, "defined in terms of the shared or mutually complementary knowledge and ability (competence) of its members for the production and interpretation of socially appropriate speech" (Bauman and Sherzer 1974:6). While universals are acknowledged, they are not assumed. Instead, "they, like other generalizations, must emerge through comparison of individual systems, investigated first in their own terms" (Bauman and Sherzer 1974:6).

In *Gender and Conversational Interaction* Tannen combines six case studies with three analytical essays on language and gender. Cross-cultural comparison is at the heart of the endeavor. The six case studies by anthropologists, linguists, and sociologists investigate the organization of casual talk in

everyday settings as they bear upon theoretical concerns of gender and language. The studies are based upon long-term field observation together with microanalyses of video or audio tape recordings and transcriptions.

The cases involve a range of settings and forms of talk-in-action, including teasing in a U.S. middle school (Donna Eder); conversational narratives of American midwestern men and women (Barbara Johnstone); adolescent 'Girl Talk' in a US high school (Penelope Eckert); U.S. pre-schoolers in day-care (Amy Sheldon); urban African-American adolescents in street conversation (Marjorie Harness Goodwin); a courtroom dispute among women in a Mayan community (Penelope Bown); and U.S. university faculty in committee meeting (Carole Edelsky).

The final three chapters (one by Edelsky and two by Deborah James with Sandra Clarke and with Janice Drakich) review the literature on several subjects of debate: interruption, floor occupation, and amount of talk. These chapters, together with Tannen's own theoretical contribution, emphasize the complexity of issues involved in theorizing gendered styles of speaking. Five of the ten chapters are reprinted from a special volume of *Discourse Processes* (13:1 Jan-March 1990) edited by Tannen.

The book is a further elaboration of the theoretical and empirical framework that Tannen, a professor of linguistics at Georgetown University, has developed in over 15 years of investigation into issues of cross-cultural and cross-gender communication. Tannen's earlier work (1979, 1981a,b, 1982, 1983, 1986) focuses on ethnic and regional styles; her later work (Tannen 1990a,b, 1994) extends the methods of cross-ethnic communications research to questions of gender and language, a trend that has brought her widespread recognition (Tannen's *You Just Don't Understand* has occupied a place on the *New York Times* best seller list for four years, and has been the subject of radio talk shows, White House commentaries, and *New Yorker* cartoons.)

Tannen's work attributes gender-related stylistic variation in speaking to cultural apartheid: men and women constitute separate, but equal, speech communities, each with a different set of rules for language use. the position builds on a justification for treating the sexes as separate speech communities spelled out by Maltz and Borker in 1982. The authors draw upon social and psychological data to argue that North American boys and girls learn rules for interaction in same-sex peer groups between the ages of five and fifteen. By the time they are adults, then, American men and women have become members of gender-specific linguistic subcultures (called "genderlects" by Edelsky 1978) with distinct rules for interaction. This results in the kind of "well-intended" miscommunication documented for members of different ethnicities.

CONTEXT

This argument, in turn, builds on the works of John Gumperz and others who investigated the phenomena of misunderstanding among same-language speakers. Examining interactions between English-English and Indian-English speakers in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s, Gumperz and colleagues found systematic miscommunication among speakers of different speech cultures (1977, 1978a, 1978b 1982a,b; Gumperz et al. 1977, Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz 1982). Problems were in part due to differences in systems of conversational inference and the cues for signalling speech acts and speaker's intent. Maltz and Borker place gender in this framework: "We prefer to think of the difficulties in both cross-sex and cross-ethnic communication as two examples of the same larger phenomenon: cultural difference and miscommunication" (1982:196). Raised in different social worlds, then, men and women do not share a set of common beliefs and presuppositions that are taken for granted as part of a background, or baseline, to conversation. In other words, they do not share what Clark and others have called common ground.

Tannen, whose own work emerges from Gumperz' interethnic communication project (Gumperz and Tannen 1979; Tannen 1979, 1981a,b, 1982) has supported the "separate-but-equal" approach to engendered cultures in a number of publications, both scholarly and popular, and illustrated the many pitfalls that occur when men and women find that they "just" do do not understand one another (1990a). Several case studies in this volume lend support to the gender apartheid approach. Sheldon, for example (Chapter 4), shows gender-specific interactions that are consistent with a number of studies of young children's sex-related strategies for negotiating conflict (Miller et al. 1986; see also Steedman et al. 1985) in which boys' discourse is characterized by dispute and separation, while girls' discourse is found to be mitigating and collaborative. These findings are congruent with predictions made by the Maltz and Borker model as well as the moral development framework of Carol Gilligan (1982).

But whereas Sheldon's case speaks directly to the Maltz and Borker proposition, it in fact illustrates much more. Three-year olds in a day-care setting examined by Sheldon bring a rich repertoire of verbal and nonverbal behavior to the conflict settings she examines. In response to demands for "fairness," for example, one girl pretends to cut a contested plastic pickle in half, insisting that it is a WHOLE half. (Yet Sheldon maintains that only boys' negotiations are "rights based.") In the course of the boys' dispute, one child turns a chair into a car and is about to drive off "to another nation," only to discover that his "adversary" has joined him in the imaginary car. His sing-song departure turns from "I-I'm going to another nation" to "We're going to another nation," as what starts out as an exclusionary

utterance turns inclusive. Sheldon's examples of talk are among the richest in the volume, and make highly enjoyable and provocative teaching choices. These examples eloquently demonstrate the extraordinary range of linguistic resources drawn upon by three-year-olds as they construct closeness and distance, dispute and reconciliation.

The separate-but-equal approach to language and gender has been criticized on several grounds. For one thing, a number of examples in the ethnographic literature counter the speech correlates for men and women initially posed by Maltz and Borker, and later elaborated by Tannen. Elinor Keenan Ochs, for example, reports that Malagasy men engage in indirect speech in order to avoid conflict, while women engage in the more direct, conflict-prone form (1974). Marjorie Harness Goodwin, whose work is found in this volume (Chapter 5), reports elsewhere that black working-class girls in west Philadelphia were at least as competent as boys in argument and ritual insult (1988). Marsh and Harr, (1978) describe football hooligan girls as the more dedicated fighters than their male counterparts. These and other examples suggest that the case for gender-specific speech and behavior is far more complex than early dichotomies suggest.

Yet another criticism of applying the ethnic pluralism model to gender is that it neglects the asymmetrical power relations among men and women. In this criticism, language is a means by which men dominate women; men hold linguistic proprietorship, a political resource that serves to maintain social power (Kramer 1975; see also Thorne and Henley 1975; Kramer et al. 1978; Kramarae et al. 1984; and Henley and Kramarae 1991; Lakoff 1975). Linguistic proprietorship of men has two important consequences: first, that men and women's language use is differently evaluated, and second, that the sexes have unequal access to discourse genres that make sense of their experience.

A third area of criticism of the gender subculture model targets its assumptions about the relationship between language and culture (Schieffelin 1987; Silverstein 1985; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992).[2] Schieffelin (1987), for example, asks whether different words (and styles) necessarily imply cultural separation. This question belongs to the larger inquiry into the meanings of culture, "shared knowledge," and the "speech community." In addressing questions of how language and culture change over time, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) ask to what extent speakers are passive vessels of received speech norms, and to what extent social relations are created in the collaborative negotiations of talk "in-the-moment"?

In *Gender and Conversational Interaction* Tannen situates her own work within the expanding ground of gender and language studies. She challenges representations of her work by others in the field as

misunderstandings, and emphasizes that she does not deny men's domination of women, nor does she ascribe gender difference to an "essential nature" of the sexes. Taking a turn in the cumulative, print conversation, Tannen points out in her introduction that cultural pluralism and dominance are not mutually exclusive: "Those who take a 'cultural' view of gender differences (many of the authors included here would fall into this group) do not deny the existence of dominance relations in general or the dominance of women by men in particular" (p. 4).

Tannen's own contribution to this volume forms its theoretical centerpiece, and constitutes a shift away from a former essentialist position. Her argument revolves around the ambiguous and polysemous nature of speech strategies: "the same linguistic means can be used for different, even opposite, purposes and can have different, even opposite, effects in different contexts" (p. 166):

> I will show that one cannot locate the source of domination, or of any interpersonal intention or effect, in linguistic strategies such as interruption, volubility, silence, and topic raising, as has been claimed. Similarly, one cannot locate the source of women's powerlessness in such linguistic strategies as indirectness, taciturnity, silence, and tag questions, as has also been claimed.(p. 165)

Taking examples from conversation as well as literary creations of conversations, Tannen repeats her earlier findings in this new context, arguing that:

> "Each of the linguistic devices that have been claimed to show dominance can also show solidarity. For example, one can talk while another is talking in order to wrest the floor; this can be seen as a move motivated by power. Yet one can also talk along with another in order to show support and agreement; this must be seen as a move motivated by solidarity. The two, however, are not mutually exclusive. If both speakers are engaged in a ritual struggle for the floor, they might experience the entire conversation as a pleasurable one: an exercise of solidarity on the metalevel. (p. 9)

She concludes, "My purpose, then, is not to question that particular linguistic devices, such as interruption, may be used to create dominance, but rather to argue that intention and effect may not be synonymous and that there is never a one-to-one relationship between any linguistic device and an interactive effect" (p. 9). The speech action theorist is here the intended "overhearer."

The conversational strategies she has discussed in earlier work -- interruption, indirectness, and silence (1981a, 1985, 1989) -- are not necessarily linked to social dominance or powerlessness. Interruption (or overlap) may be either supportive or dominant; silence and indirectness may indicate control or powerlessness. Tannen has argued this before, but here she consolidates her argument and supporting examples to a single coherent position: that which influences meaning, as well as relations of power, is the interactional context.

Tannen's argument is nowhere better illustrated than in Penelope Brown's chapter on gender and

politeness in a Mayan Tzeltal court case. In this example, ordinary conversational structures and interactional norms are violated as the litigants display discord and anger. Features used to convey positive affect, empathy, and agreement are in this confrontational setting used to convey the opposite: negative affect, hostility, and contradiction (p. 145). Characterstically female forms of politeness are -- in this arena -- transformed through irony into sarcastic agreement. Brown, an early pioneer in studies of language and gender (1976, 1979, 1980; Brown and Levinson (1978) mentioned above), concludes that "gender indexing is context dependent" (p. 145). The Mayan case, where linguistic forms associated with agreement and cooperation in some contexts are used to express conflict, hostility, and disagreement in others, well demonstrates the relevance of context to meaning.

PARTICIPATION REVISITED

Perhaps the most theoretically significant of the essays is Marjorie Harness Goodwin's chapter, "Tactical Use of Stories: Participation Frameworks Within Boys' and Girls' Disputes." One of the first researchers to conduct an ethnography of speaking that focuses on gender distinctions, Goodwin observed and recorded the play of working class black adolescents in a west Philadelphia neighborhood over eighteen months (1978, 1980a,b, 1990). In the present volume, Goodwin recounts how boys use story as a means to further an argument while negotiating status within a hierarchical social order; girls, in contrast, deploy an "instigating" strategy: reporting the deeds of absent parties (p. 127). But Goodwin's goal is not a simple correlation of speech strategy with gender. Goodwin's central point is that stories provide arenas for each gender cohort to negotiate concerns central to each group's notions of social organization (p. 129). The children may be said to use dispute, and the narratives that constitute it, to arrange and rearrange their social organization (p. 110). Here the context or arena is created by language itself.

In Goodwin's approach participant frameworks are mutable and are shaped in the telling of the story. A situation can change from a paired encounter (dialogue) with some positioned as "onlookers," to a "story" form, in which former onlookers actively participate in the production of a story (see C. Goodwin 1984, 1986). In the transition from dialogue to story, the addressee is referred to in the third person, as former "onlookers" to the dispute become the participating audience to the story. The switch creates a participation framework into which former "overhearers" are invited to participate in the talk. The structure of participation thus shapes the interactions of the moment.

In this formulation, talk is viewed as an emergent process through which social situations and identities are structured and restructured, constructed and reconstructed. The roles of participants vis-à-vis the

talk are in flux, an outcome of interactive play. Goodwin presents talk as both shaped by the social activity in which it occurs, as well as actively shaping the events and relations of the children who produce it. In Goodwin's chapter participation establishes common ground, as the children are shown to use talk collaboratively to transform the social relations and the social organization of the moment. The complexity and dynamism inherent in participant frameworks demonstrated by Goodwin's study contrasts with the rigidity in Clark's decontextualized models of participation.

A SOCIAL HISTORY OF LANGUAGE: PETER BURKE

Ironically, the treatment that most emphasizes arenas (contexts) of language use is the historian's, for he situates language use in both space and time. Peter Burke is a Reader in cultural history at the University of Cambridge. Among his works of interest to anthropologists are *Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy* (1987), the article "History as Social Memory" (1989), and the co-edited collection (with R. Porter and afterward by Dell Hymes), *Language, Self and Society* (1991).

Insofar as he departs from traditional approaches to the history of language that were centered on internal linguistic change or speakers' migratory movements, and applies instead the methods of sociolinguistics and ethnography to intellectual history, Burke may be said to be a principal contributor to the new field known as the social history of language (SHL: see also Stedman Jones 1983; McIntosh 1986; Phillips 1984; for recent studies see Siegel 1987; Towson 1992; for collections and reviews see Corfield 1991; Palmer 1990).

Consisting of five scholarly papers, Burke's *The Art of Conversation* lays out the methods of a social history of language, then presents applications of this method to a broad array of times, places, and issues. For example, one essay explores the changing role of Latin after its presumed decline in the middle ages. Another essay takes up the interplay of language and culture among elites in seventeenth-century Italy, whose common speech community persisted in spite of an otherwise fragmented polity. Two of the five essays appear in print for the first time: the first a discussion of the art of polite conversation as prescribed in manuals from sixteenth-century Britain and France; the second a history of silence in early modern Europe.

Because he takes the "long" view, Burke goes further than most psycho- and sociolinguists in exploring contrasts in language use over time and across social groups. This leads him to consider a fundamental feature of language use largely neglected in other works: language change in social context. Burke's central concern is the way in which linguistic criteria are perceived and evaluated by members of the community. He recognizes dimensions of linguistic change that are both categorical as well as

incremental, as fluctuating and contrastive patterns of speaking are related to a complex of sociological features, including gender, class, and regional or national ideologies.

Take, for example, Burke's essay on language and identity in early modern Europe from the late fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Burke outlines three phases in the changing attitudes of the elites to regional dialects in Italy and other parts of Europe and relates these to political and social configurations. Burke's first phase begins in the late fifteenth century and is characterized by a universal use of regional dialects across social classes. The second phase, in contrast, is marked by the deliberate withdrawal of the landed classes from local varieties of speech (p. 82), and the appearance of a supra-local register, positively evaluated by the nobles as a "standard" in contrast to the regional dialects, exclusively associated with the peasantry. Burke's third phase -- occurring in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries -- is marked by renewed interest in local dialects. Having abandoned or forgotten regional speech by the early nineteenth century, the nobles sponsored the publication of texts and dictionaries in local dialects. In this period of regional revitalization, local registers are re-evaluated as positive and the peasant as symbol of regional pride (p. 83; and Burke 1978:270-280). As Burke puts it, "In other words, the upper classes once spoke dialect naturally. Later on, they knew it but tried not to speak it. Finally they tried to speak dialect, because its symbolic associations had become positive, but by that time many of them had probably forgotten it." (p. 83) Although he recognizes the possibility that the nobles sought a standard language across regions in order to distinguish themselves from the peasantry, Burke accepts as the more powerful and valid explanation the nobles' own rationale: their need to communicate across regions. In relating linguistic shift to political developments, Burke assumes the perspective of his sources, the nobles, as recorded in their treatises. The unpublished remain voiceless.

Unlike the authors in Tannen's volume, Burke is concerned with inter-class issues as opposed to intra-class ones. Accordingly, he reworks the "cooperative principle" of speech act theorist Grice. Burke argues that the game of conversation may be played in an adversarial, as well as a collaborative, manner: "If conversation is the verbal equivalent of tennis, there are some participants who play to defeat an opponent rather than to keep the ball in the air for the longest possible time" (p. 92). Burke's writing begins with the premise that language is interactively produced, reproduced, and challenged. Burke's book offers an example of the active role of language in society and reminds us that the real potency of language lies in its attachment to social and linguistic practice.

DISCUSSION: CROSS-GENRE TALK

Scholarship in language and society is not confined to conventional disciplinary boundaries. The three works considered here represent language-centered research from three different disciplinary gazes. Psycholinguists and sociolinguists have been concerned with questions of participation, comprehension, and common ground, but their respective approaches to each of these issues have been strikingly different.

The most "traditionally linguistic" of the three, Clark's *Arenas* has less to do with arenas as context than it has to do with questions of comprehension and meaning within a delimited and experimentally-designed setting. In the microanalyses of psycholinguistics, a problem derived from linguistic theory is framed and a method of empirical investigation designed to answer it most efficiently. Directions of inquiry are translated into hypotheses, and tested in controlled settings. Utterance frames are kept to a minimum so that a manageable set of variables can be observed. Ideally, the outcome should provide evidence of the soundness of the hypothesis and, by extension, shed light on general principles of language use.

The procedure is internally consistent, but its findings fall short for a number of reasons. First, the notions of "general" language use are largely derived from a single language and a narrow segment of speakers. Second, the hypotheses are normally uncontroversial, even as the formal apparatus surrounding them appears unnecessary or overly complex. Finally, and most important for our discussion, the premises upon which the procedure is based (that an isolated sentance may be analyzed for meaning) is flawed for the simple reason that context is essential to comprehension. Indeed, the meaning of an utterance is constructed through context.

Anthropological linguistics represents a departure from the experimental methodologies that focus on the intention of an individual speaker and the factors that contribute to the efficacy of his or her utterance. The sociolinguistic and ethnographic approaches, instead, explore speech as it occurs in naturally-occurring, collective, social experience. In this socially constituted linguistics, concern is with socially-based modes of organization of linguistics means rather than the abstract grammar or static communicative principles of a single language (Hymes 1973:316).

Anthropological linguists, such as the contributors to Tannen's volume, take as their unit of analysis actual conversational turns within sequences, rather than isolated utterances. Here, talk itself forms the contextual framework. The method of recording everyday interactions through video or audio tape recordings, and analyzing a stream of talk, emerges from the empirical traditions of conversational analysis (see, for example, Sacks et al. 1974); its roots in sociology (Garfinkle 1967, 1972; Goffman

1961); as well as other ethnographic methodologies that value the attempt to faithfully "capture" behavior with a minimum of "external intervention."

While Clark focuses on "common ground" as a central conceptual tool, he virtually ignores the question of culture. On the other hand, many anthropological linguists "find" cultural or subcultural patterns (indeed, it is a notion of common ground that underlies the anthropologists' concept of culture), but neglect to relate these findings to theoretical considerations of common ground and how it builds in and through conversation.

This is especially unfortunate in the case of the gender communication project since its problem falls squarely within issues of common ground. In their landmark article opening the gender-as-culture debate, Maltz and Borker write, "Conversation . . . progresses in large part because of shared assumptions about what is going on" (1982:201). Where miscommunication occurs with regularity, the gender-as-culture proponents posit a "subculture;" hence the different "worlds" of men and women in American society. This labels rather than explains, and avoids important theoretical and methodological questions. The failing of this literature is that it does not situate its argument within a larger theoretical frame. The issue is especially important, since, from the point of view of the anthropological investigator, common ground is both the product of culture and the locus of cultural transformation.

It is at this juncture -- the role of language as both reflecting and shaping social interaction -- that we reach a fundamental dilemma in studies of language and society. Scholars of language and society generally treat language as the product of social norm, but neglect its role in generating emerging forms. Irregularity, the locus of social change, fits poorly within a framework that focuses exclusively on the normative. We continue to lag in our understanding of how commonality is interactively produced, interpreted, negotiated, debated, and reproduced. Addressing both methodologically and analytically the complexity, adaptability, and dynamism inherent in naturally occurring talk-in-action is the challenge that faces all students of language.

Finally, the social history of language approach borrows from ethnographic approaches its view of language as a vehicle for understanding social life. But whereas ethnographic techniques utilize video recordings or audio recordings of naturally-occurring activities, the social history of language relies for its data upon the self-consciously conceived manuscripts that are themselves commentaries on speech as it should be performed.

Literary historic analysis begins with written texts and explores the location of language within an

historic period. Written language is at once the object and instrument of study. The analyses are necessarily limited to the perspectives of the authors of written texts, leaving those of any but the few literate a matter of inference. The investigation is therefore far more normative than if based upon natural, observable conversation: the talk that occurs in actual interaction.

Furthermore, the historians' breadth of time and space bring vertigo to both the psychologist and the sociolinguist. In one of Burke's chapters, "medieval Europe" is taken as a unit of analysis. In it, Burke draws upon texts written in several languages and encompassing two or three centuries. In the absence of actual observation, then, Burke's approach is the least empirical, and the most deductive of the three. In Burke's case, context is supplied by the author, whose persuasion lies in the synthetic power of historic reconstruction.

CONCLUSION: EXPANDING THE GROUND

The problem of common ground extends to the disciplines themselves. Contributors to related fields may be seen as participants in an ongoing conversation in which the academic performance (a published treatise) itself constitutes a main resource for the organization of context.

The collaborative nature of participation is well illustrated in the expanding ground created by the literature on language and society. The importance of these essays, spanning twenty years of language theory, lies in their exposure of a process unfolding (and changing) over time. Together, the three works demonstrate how salience and ground build in scholarly discourse. In that process, a "discovery," or innovation, is foregrounded against an accumulating ground of knowledge, a "state of the discipline." As the essays move forward in time, that which was novel in a previous essay is the assumed "common ground" of subsequent essays. The resulting cumulative corpus is something of a repetitive exercise that evolves incrementally. Each piece foregrounds a focal point that in subsequent essays becomes background -- exposing performatively the forward movement of scholarly discourse. Here common ground is an agreed upon set of principles, such as "the collaborative nature of speech," that gains common currency or acceptance through continual use and honing.

The three books taken together represent both a convergence and a departure. The three studies of language might have bridged some of the gaps that separate the disciplines from one another. Instead, the specialized lexicons, methodologies, and different foci of interests have prevailed to reaffirm the mystification and boundaries between fields. The ethnographically oriented, the psychologically oriented, and the historically oriented linguists seem to be saying to one another: "You just don't understand."

NOTES

[1]Recently social psychologists who consider the importance of context and test it in experimental settings have found gender to be a strong predictor of linguistic behavior (see, for example, Gonzales et al. 1990).

[2]For overviews of literature on gender and language, see Cameron 1985; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992; Edelsky 1978; Gal 1991; McConnell-Ginnet 1988; Moi 1985; Keenan Ochs 1992; Philips 1980; Sherzer 1987; Silverstein 1985; Smith 1985). For collections see Coates and Cameron 1988, McConnell-Ginet, Borker, and Furman 1980; Philips, Steele and Tanz 1987; Thorne, Kramarae, and Henley 1983; Fisher and Todd 1988. For case studies, see Brown 1980; Coates 1986, Dauer 1975; Eder and Hallinan 1978; Farber 1975, 1978; MH Goodwin 1990; Harding 1975; Harris 1980; Keenan Ochs 1974; Kramarae 1981, Smith 1985).

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